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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 001145

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ' NEW PARTY: INFLATED NUMBERS AND DEEP  
DIVISIONS

REF: CARACAS 000968 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT RICHARD DOWNES,  
REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary. President Chavez is boasting that over five million voters have joined his new party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). While the PSUV is on track to be the country's largest political party, PSUV promoters appear to be inflating the membership rolls. The membership drive over the last two months has been characterized by tepid turn-out, logistical problems, strong-arming of government employees, and blatant government support for Chavez' single "revolutionary" party. Chavez' uncompromising efforts to impose unity have ironically proven particularly divisive, alienating three small, but prominent, pro-Chavez parties. Looking ahead, some 21,000 PSUV "socialist battalions" are supposed to elect delegates in July to a party-forming conference slated for autumn. Despite the PSUV's shortcomings so far, so long as Chavez makes it a vehicle for distributing patronage and punishing hold-outs, it is still likely to become a formidable electoral machine. End Summary.

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Cooking the Books  
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12. (SBU) During his June 10, nationwide "Alo, Presidente" broadcast, President Chavez claimed that during the previous six weekends (April 29 - June 3), over 5 million "aspiring militants" had signed up for his single "revolutionary" party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). There are over 16 million registered voters in Venezuela. According to preliminary statistics issued by the PSUV Promotion Commission, the National Electoral Council (CNE) had registered 5,395,938 registered voters into Chavez' proposed party, 73.8 percent of Chavez' vote total in the December 2006 presidential election. But in a June 5 op-ed in the pro-government daily "Vea," former Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel, a member of the PSUV organizing committee, claimed just 4.4 million new PSUV members.

13. (C) The PSUV is easily on track to be Venezuela's largest political party, and according to the official figures, will be larger than Chavez' previous political party, the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR). While Chavez is proclaiming the "success" of the PSUV membership drive, his and the PSUV committee's numbers do not appear to add up. PSUV organizers

claimed only 1.3 million new members at the half-way mark. After claiming a cumulative total of over 2 million members at the end of the May 19-20 weekend, PSUV organizers claimed that registration doubled to over 4 million during the weekend of May 26-27, even though CNE conducted registration in fewer states that weekend. There were no reported signs of a surge in PSUV registration that weekend, and certainly not a surge that equates to one in eight registered voters signing up over a two-day period.

¶4. (C) PSUV organizers set the ambitious membership goal of registering 55 percent of the registered voters who voted for Chavez in the December 2006 presidential. Despite a slow start, they nevertheless "exceeded" their goals in Caracas and in 22 of 23 states (coming up just short only in Carabobo State). Party organizers even "exceeded" their goals by over 150 percent in five states, including Zulia, where de facto opposition leader Manuel Rosales is governor. The PSUV is claiming that in the states of Apure and Cojedes, more registered voters signed up for the PSUV than voted for Chavez last December. The Attorney General of Nueva Esparta State told poloff that local PSUV promoters had grossly inflated registration numbers there.

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Changing Tactics  
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¶5. (SBU) PSUV organizers have had to adjust their tactics on many fronts in order to boost party registration. Initially, party registration took place at designated sites, such as schools. But when insufficient numbers of registered voters traveled to the centers, mobile CNE units were formed to take party registration directly to working class neighborhoods and at Caracas Metro stops. Party registration was also extended by one weekend to June 9-10, to allow CNE mobile units more time to canvass pro-Chavez areas more thoroughly

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throughout Venezuela. Party organizers are also considering ways to allow Venezuelans residing abroad to join the party.

¶6. (C) After initial invitations to join the PSUV, party organizers stepped up the BRV's machinery to force government employees and contractors to join Chavez' single pro-government party (Reftel). Government media outlets, particularly Venezolana de Television (VTV), have been actively promoting party recruitment. Beneficiaries of the government's many social programs or "missions" have also been targeted for recruitment efforts. According to a member of the National Assembly, 50 percent of the persons who joined the PSUV in Chavez' home state of Barinas belong to one of the government's social missions. There are also media reports of some active duty military officers joining the party, contrary to a constitutional prohibition.

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Antagonizing Allies  
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¶7. (C) President Chavez has lambasted and ostracized three small, but prominent, pro-Chavez parties that declined to dissolve and join the PSUV unconditionally. The leaders of Patria Para Todos (PPT), Podemos, and the Communist Party (PCV) continue to express support for Chavez' "socialist revolution," but the BRV no longer considers the parties part of the government. A large number of leaders and rank-and-file members deserted all three parties to join the PSUV, exacerbating inter-party tensions between unconditional Chavez loyalists and the hold-outs. The three parties now occupy a political purgatory, not enjoying the trust of either the Venezuelan president or the opposition. The PCV still garners some grudging respect from PSUV leaders; PPT less so, and Podemos is very much on the out. In the wake of Chavez' sharp criticism of the hold-out parties, Podemos Secretary General Ismael Garcia has been particularly

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critical of the autocratic nature of the formation of the PSUV. He also met recently with students demonstrating against the government's closure of RCTV.

¶8. (SBU) President Chavez is also accentuating class identification within the PSUV. He suggested some weeks ago that while the PSUV was ostensibly open to all Venezuelans, wealthy Venezuelans would be expected to demonstrate their social commitment to others. During his June 10 "Alo, Presidente" broadcast, Chavez said the PSUV needs "real socialists" who donate their surplus goods to others. "Whoever has a refrigerator that he does not need," Chavez continued, "should bring it to Bolivar Square." Noting that he does not have "riches," Chavez said he will donate USD 250,000 in prize money that he received some time ago from Libya.

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Next Steps  
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¶9. (SBU) Chavez was slated to address a mass rally of PSUV members on June 9 at a Caracas arena, but the Ministry of Popular Power for Information announced the cancellation of the event without explanation only hours before it was scheduled to take place. The mass rally was slated to be a follow-on to the March 24 swearing-in of over 2,300 party promoters at a Caracas auditorium and the April 19 swearing in of over 16,000 PSUV promoters at a Caracas stadium. General Alberto Muller Rojas, a leading member of the PSUV Promotion Commission, recently told the media that the over 5 million "aspiring militants" would be organized into 21,565 "socialist battalions" of 200-plus members each.

¶10. (SBU) Elections for a party congress are supposed to be completed by July 7, but the date is likely to slip. Regional meetings of elected "militants" were penciled in for July 31. A founding party congress of 2,200 delegates is supposed to begin on August 15 and conclude on November 17. Chavez has also proposed that party members participate in a referendum on PSUV leaders and a platform on December 2, an event designed to imbue the new party greater democratic legitimacy.

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Comment  
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¶11. (C) Chavez' previous political party, the Fifth Republic

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Movement (MVR), was more of an electoral machine than a grassroots, ideologically coherent political party. With far more experience tearing down institutions than building them, Chavez' efforts to create a new, more disciplined and substantive political party are off to an inauspicious start.

At the same time, Chavez has a habit of setting overly ambitious goals in order to achieve his aims. He set an outsized goal of 10 million votes for the December 2006, and polled 7.3 million (62.8% of the vote). With respect to the PSUV, however, Chavez and his closest supporters appear to have set the bar too high, but are nevertheless claiming to have cleared it.

¶12. (C) Despite the lingering problems of the PSUV and inflated registration numbers, Chavez' single pro-government party is easily on track to become Venezuela's largest political party. By blurring the distinction between party and state, Chavez and his supporters will be able to offer -- and/or threaten -- Venezuelan voters with far more carrots and sticks than what beleaguered opposition political parties can muster. Joining the PSUV is already widely perceived as a way for persons who signed the recall referendum petition against Chavez -- and later became subject to government

discrimination as a result -- to ingratiate themselves with the BRV. Even if the PSUV fails to become a political party with deep roots and a coherent vision, it is still likely to be as formidable an electoral machine as the MVR.

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